

May 3, 2020 Flower Communion - Zoom  
Claire Feingold Thoryn  
Worship Theme - Ritual

**Call to Worship** – Claire

One thing we traditionally do on the same Sunday as Flower Communion is baby and child dedications. Please contact me if that is something you would like to do in the coming months in a virtual, socially distanced way. I look forward to the day in the future when I can again hold a baby and bless her in front of our community!

We have our Flower Communion traditionally on the first Sunday in May, which is always close to the ancient Celtic holiday of Beltane.

Bel was the Celtic god of light, and taine meant fire.

The people would gather for all kinds of ecstatic rituals—May poles, dancing, bonfires, lover’s trysts, parades, feasts.

Flowers were everywhere. It sounds wonderful.

Of course that means the Puritans hated it—all that sensuous festivity!—and so the holiday never found strong footing here in the US. In fact, the Puritans even banned Maypoles in 1644.

But as centuries passed, in our own way, we Unitarian Universalists have found a way to celebrate spring and the transient, miraculous beauty of flowers, creativity, and new life.

Beryl will share more about the meaning of the Flower Communion ritual.

And while we cannot be together today—no May pole for us—we can still celebrate the flower, and what it says to us about life.

I call us to worship with the poem “The Flower” by Frank Kendon:

All’s in this flower ...

Times, seasons, losses, all the fruits of woe,  
Beauty’s fragility, and death’s bare gain,  
Pluck’d in passing by, five minutes ago.

All’s in this flower, the war of life and death,  
God’s character and purpose written down,  
The force of love, the proof and power of faith  
All’s here, and all unknown.

Let us worship together.

Our chalices will be lit this morning with words of affirmation  
shared by our 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

### **Prayer Claire**

With gratitude to the late Rev. Max Coots and his Vegetable Prayer, I offer you my flower prayer:

Let us give thanks for a bouquet of people.

We give thanks for children. Like tulips and iris, they multiply around us, making the world ever more filled with color, beauty, and new life. May we bless them as they replant themselves ever further from us, knowing that they need their own space to grow into.

We give thanks for generous friends, as constant in bloom as echinacea and whose gifts lift up our body and spirit.

We give thanks for feisty friends as indomitable as geraniums, and for continuous friends, who, like bittersweet and ivy, hold on and never let go...and can never be gotten rid of.

For crotchety friends, as prickly as rosebushes, their beauty a secret that is only discovered through careful gardening.  
For surprising friends, who at first glance seem dour and then blossom into joy as quickly as forsythia.

For funny friends, silly as snapdragons,  
And serious friends, complex as chrysanthemums.

For comfortable friends, their gentle presence as soothing as the sweet smell of lilacs.

For stormy weather friends, who stand by us in hard times, like lily of the valley that cannot be deterred by shade or shadow.

For old friends, nodding like sunflowers in the evening-time  
And young friends coming on fast as phlox.

For friends as unpretentious as dogwood,  
as persistent as pachysandra,  
as steadfast as azalea,  
and who, like snowdrops, can be counted on to see you through the winter and remind you that spring always comes.

For loving friends, who wind around us like wisteria and embrace us, despite our blights, wilts, and witherings,

And, finally, for forget-me-not friends, gone but never forgotten.  
Their beauty lives on in our memories and hearts.

For this bouquet of people, who brighten our lives each in their  
own way, we give thanks.

*Amen.*

Our morning's offering, benefitting the important work of the  
Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, will now be given and  
gratefully received. The music is by Follen member Lucy  
Markelz.

**Reading – “A Light exists in Spring...” by Emily Dickinson**

A Light exists in Spring  
Not present on the Year  
At any other period—  
When March is scarcely here

A Color stands abroad  
On Solitary Fields  
That Science cannot overtake  
But Human Nature feels.

It waits upon the Lawn,  
It shows the furthest Tree  
Upon the furthest Slope you know  
It almost speaks to you.

Then as Horizons step  
Or Noons report away

Without the Formula of sound  
It passes and we stay—  
A quality of loss  
Affecting our Content  
As Trade had suddenly encroached  
Upon a Sacrament.

### **Homily – A Color Stands Abroad**

It seemed right to use a poem by one of our state's most famous recluses.

She would have been right at home during quarantine—literally. Emily Dickenson rarely left her house, or for that matter, her bedroom. And her poetry still contained worlds.

I imagine her composing this poem as she looked out her bedroom window in Amherst, seeing the light return to New England.

Science can explain the seasons, the changing light, but human nature is what gives us feelings about it.

Science can explain flowers, why they grow the way they do, but human nature is what gives us feelings about them.

Science can tell us to stay home, but human nature is what calls us to do it even when it is hard, even with all the feelings it brings up in us.

Science can protect us and teach us, but it is humans who can love us and understand us.

And we humans are missing each other right now.

(As Beryl said?) There is something very real, beyond the tangible flowers in our Flower Communion, that is missing from our ritual today.

Many of us found and offered flowers for the video.  
But now we cannot reach out and receive the gift of a flower,  
take it home.

We learn what rituals mean by doing them.

Part of what I love about flower communion is the sense that  
your flower is a gift to an unknown person—  
you don't choose who picks up your flower to take home,  
and rarely will the person taking home the flower know  
who they've received it from.

There's this sense when a gift is anonymous of being loved by  
everyone and anyone.

That in holding the slim stem of a flower is a symbol of the  
community holding you up, that gentle eyes are on you and you  
are well cared for.

It actually reminds me of the many generous gifts into the  
Minister's Discretionary Fund in the past month.

Many anonymous kind people, giving to others they don't know,  
but knowing the need will be there.

And in the future, as you have the need, the gift has already been  
given, a hand held out ready to hold up the stem of your flower.

I hope you can have a sense of that, even now.

I read something by Dr. Ira Byock this week. Dr. Byock is a  
leading scholar around palliative care and end of life. He wrote:

“Years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a  
student what she considered to be the first sign of  
civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk  
about fishhooks or clay pots or grinding stones.

But no. Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an  
ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been

broken and then healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.

A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts, Mead said.”

And so, Dr. Byock concludes, “We are at our best when we serve others. Be civilized.”

We are all serving each other, and untold strangers right now, in the simplest of ways. Spring passes outside our windows, “It passes and we stay—”

A quality of loss  
Affecting our Content  
As Trade had suddenly encroached  
Upon a Sacrament.

A quality of loss: we are missing the way we usually celebrate this annual sacrament together.

This is what it means right now to be civilized.

We care for those who fall, we bind up each other’s wounds, we carry each other to safety

and we see each other through to recovery.

There is another side to this pandemic season;

it will pass and we will stay.

We may not know the people who we share our gifts with or who share their gifts with us, who love us: it could be anyone, it could be everyone.

This is what community looks like.

May we care for each other well.

*Amen.*

### **Benediction**

And now in our comings and our goings,  
May the light of Love shine upon us,  
out from within us,  
be gracious unto us,  
and give us peace.

For this is the day we are given;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

*Amen.*

Thank you for being a part of our service today.

Please stay 10 or 15 minutes for “Coffee Hour”—we will assign you randomly into a breakout room. You can come back to the main room or leave at any time. And we are trying one new thing, if you are a family with young kids, we invite you to stay in the main room here for a bit, if you’d like to connect with other children and families before joining your breakout room or signing off for the day.